

JUDICIAL BRANCH FARES WELL IN NEW STATE BUDGET

After years of cutbacks and absorbing new expenses within existing resources, the state's judiciary appears to be on the rebound, if the new state budget approved Tuesday by the Legislature is any indication of things to come. Appropriations for judiciary-related activities were generally at a level higher than in prior years and, in some instances, targeted to address certain problem and priority areas. The following is a brief list of specific appropriations contained in the court-related portions of the budget package (including [AB 1801](#), [AB 1806](#), and [AB 1811](#)).

Trial Court Operations

- Provides \$2.8 billion for trial court operations, with up to \$5 million specifically targeted for services to self-help litigants
- Provides \$46.4 million for the Child Support Commissioners Program
- Provides an additional \$18.7 million for court security to add new screening stations at various court facilities and establish a five-year replacement schedule for entrance screening equipment
- Provides \$10.4 million for the Equal Access Fund. Funds would be distributed by the Judicial Council through the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission to qualified legal services and support centers for legal services in civil matters involving indigent individuals.
- Expands the statutory application of the State Appropriations Limit (SAL) to provide for year-to-year increases in the Equal Access Fund and the Modernization Fund
- Provides \$10 million to expand the use of interpreters in high priority civil cases
- Provides \$2.9 million for California Collaboration and Drug Court Projects

Judges

- Provides for an 8.5 percent salary increase for judges (4.25% in January of 2007 and 4.25% in January of 2008).
- Provides \$5.5 million to support facilities and staff for up to 50 new judgeships in fiscal year 2006-07. The governor's January budget proposed the addition of 50 new judgeships in each of the next three years. The budget approved by the Legislature provides for up to 50 new judgeships in 2006-07 but does not commit to future judicial expansion. The \$5.5

million appropriation is intended to cover only partial year costs; additional judges cannot be appointed until the Legislature passes a bill authorizing new judgeships. The Judicial Council has developed a priority list regarding the placement of new judgeships in the respective counties.

Court Facilities

- Provides \$61.3 million for the renovation of the Sisk Federal Courthouse in Fresno.
- Provides \$6.8 million for the Fourth District Court of Appeals in Santa Ana.
- Provides \$2.3 million for a new Antioch Area courthouse in Contra Costa County.
- Provides \$2 million for a new Mammoth Lakes courthouse in Mono County.
- Provides \$706,000 for a new Portola/Loyalton courthouse to serve Plumas and Sierra Counties.

The appropriations cited above will not become a reality until the budget is signed into law by the governor, since he has the option of reducing or deleting (line item veto) any appropriation approved by the Legislature.

LAWYER CONTRIBUTIONS TO LEGAL SERVICES BILL ADVANCES

A bill to authorize the State Bar to collect voluntary contributions from its members for the support of legal services cleared the Senate Judiciary Committee this week on a 3-1 party-line vote.

[AB 2301](#) (Assembly Judiciary Committee) would require the State Bar to act on the recommendations of a task force appointed by the Bar president "to propose an appropriate method for facilitating the collection and distribution of voluntary contributions" from bar members.

This was the second hearing on AB 2301 in the past two weeks. An earlier vote on the bill was postponed after Senate Judiciary Committee chairman [Joe Dunn](#) (D-Santa Ana) requested additional time to consider other policy issues related to the bill. In the end, Dunn, consistent with his longstanding support for indigent legal services, supported the bill after Assembly Judiciary Committee Chair [Dave Jones](#) (D-Sacramento) agreed to amendments related to a periodic review of any proposed voluntary assessment. AB 2301 next goes to the full Senate for a vote.